

Testimony of
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Before the Appropriations Committee
February 22, 2018

Recommendations for Supporting English Learners

Good evening Senator Formica, Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Orlando Rodriguez. I serve as the Research and Policy Development Specialist for the Connecticut Education Association (CEA) and as our organization's chief economist.

CEA urges the committee to expand Governor Malloy's proposed funding for bilingual education by making bilingual education funds available to more districts and more students with English learning needs.

CEA is proposing simple changes to current statutes that,

- increase funding for English Learners (ELs) from about \$78 to roughly \$98 per pupil,
- make about 3,800 more EL students eligible for bilingual education funding,
- expand EL funding to 16 additional districts, and
- do *not* require additional funding beyond the \$2.8 million for bilingual education proposed by the governor, though we advocate for additional funds given the challenges EL students face and the recent influx of students from hurricane damaged areas.

Currently, statutes require that all EL funding above \$1.9 million be used for reports, consultants, studies, etc. If we do not make CEA's proposed changes in statute, then in FY 2019 nearly \$900,000 will be taken away from EL students and their teachers. Two statutory changes are need to stop this diversion of EL funds.

First, the \$1.9 million cap on EL funding to schools must be removed so that all \$2.8 million will go directly to schools. This language is in C.G.S. § 10-17g.

Second, there is currently a minimum threshold for districts to receive bilingual education funds (C.G.S. § 10-17f). Only districts with 20 students speaking the same language in the same *school* are eligible. As we are suggesting to the Education Committee, this should be changed to 20 students speaking the same language in the same district, which will make an additional 3,800 ELs eligible for funding as well as expanding funding to an additional 16 towns, which have not been receiving these funds. The new towns would include Berlin, Branford, Brookfield, Derby, Enfield, Groton, Middletown, Naugatuck, Newington, Old Saybrook, Plainville, Shelton, South Windsor, Vernon, Winchester, and Windsor.

The student population of ELs is growing rapidly but there is not an officially recognized organization that represents interests of ELs and understands how their day-to-day challenges differ from English-dominant students. Our third proposal, which we will also discuss in greater detail with the Education Committee, is that the legislature create a State

Advisory Council for English Learners for the Connecticut State Department of Education similar to the current State Advisory Council on Special Education. This EL advisory council would be composed of a broad set of stakeholders including parents, teachers, various state agencies, teachers' unions, superintendents, providers of services to immigrants, child advocates, etc. Furthermore, our proposal requires that the top five most commonly-spoken foreign languages be represented on the council. These include Spanish, Portuguese, Mandarin Chinese, Polish, and Arabic.

We ask for your support for these statutory changes, which will benefit thousands of ELs in Connecticut and not cost the state more than is already being spent. S

State Oversight and Transparency for Publically Funded Charter Schools

CEA does not support Governor Malloy's proposed additional funding to expand charter schools, particularly while cutting and underfunding the education of more than 500,000 students who do not attend a charter school. The governor is "robbing Peter to pay Paul."

Connecticut has two parallel public education systems – a costly endeavor that makes it more difficult to make our traditional public schools stronger. Studies of charter school performance show that they generally do not do better than our traditional schools. Where they do show success, it is highly attributable to the small school size. This is a benefit shown in research to make a difference, yet the costs of running parallel systems makes it harder for traditional schools to act "smaller." Our *publically*-funded charter schools are nothing more than *small*-enrollment public schools. Please keep this in mind for the next couple of minutes.

CEA believes that our taxpayer money should be spent transparently while treating all providers of state services equally and without preference. This is not how some publically-funded charter schools operate. These schools use taxpayer monies to pay for supposed "management" services that are *in-fact* intentionally made difficult to unearth.

C.G.S. § 10-66mm states that the State Board of Education shall, "... *define allowable direct or indirect costs and the methodology to be used by Charter Management Organizations [CMOs] to calculate per pupil service fees; ...*" This wording is vague so we requested clarification from the CT State Dept. of Education (CSDE). After having to file a Freedom of Information Act request, the following explanation was given, "*The statute does not prescribe any particular method for determining the compensation, leaving that to the parties.*" CSDE has not complied with the original intent of the statute, which was for CSDE to determine "the methodology." Currently we do not have one single methodology applied to all CMOs, we have several methodologies unique to each CMO. The methodology is to put all allowable costs – not reasonable costs – in one bucket and divide by the number of pupils to get the per-pupil fee. This is reverse engineering of the per pupil fee specifically for each CMO. This is opposite to the intent of the statute. The consequences are that CMO fees are hard to uncover because they are either (1) comingled with normal operating costs, or (2) reported separately without adequate details on what we are paying for.

In short, CEA asks that the calculation of per-pupil management fees for CMOs be calculated as was originally intended. That is, one methodology used for all CMOs and one per-pupil management fee for all CMOs statewide. From FY 2011 to FY 2016, payments to CMOs more than doubled, going from \$3 million to nearly \$7 million.

Furthermore, in FY 2010 *publically*-funded charters reported \$7.2 million in donations (and "other" revenue) and in FY 2017 they had nearly \$17 million. None of these monies were used to offset their state charter grant. Furthermore, earlier this month, some charters requested additional state funding for this fiscal year for seats that had not been approved.

Returning to the topic that I raised earlier about small enrollment public schools: In traditional public schools, the largest enrollment is 3,041 at Danbury High School. In *publically*-funded charter schools, the largest charter school is Achievement 1st Hartford with an enrollment of 1,066. Empirical research shows clearly that students have higher academic achievement in small-enrollment schools in-part because of greater parental involvement and more attentive student engagement. By funding a parallel system, are we not creating the opportunity for charter schools to do this at

the expense of students and parents in larger schools? Are parents who support charters really saying that they want small local public schools, in their neighborhoods, where parents have some say in the operation of the school?

Instead of a separate, and duplicative, system of charter schools, why not help all traditional public schools engage students and parents in the way “low-enrollment” schools can? We do not need to build more small schools, but we also shouldn’t be shuttering the ones we have. We do not have to divide up large high schools, but we can help them seem smaller by enabling parental engagement and more attentive student services. Let’s provide the opportunity for all traditional public schools to become highly engaged “problem solving” community schools. This is a low-cost option proven successful in other states. By doing so we will,

- economically connect more needed resources and services to children and, to some degree, their families,
- increase education outcomes for all students and especially for impoverished communities, and
- create more choice for parents by the simple fact that there will be more traditional public schools to pick from.

I thank you for your time and attention.